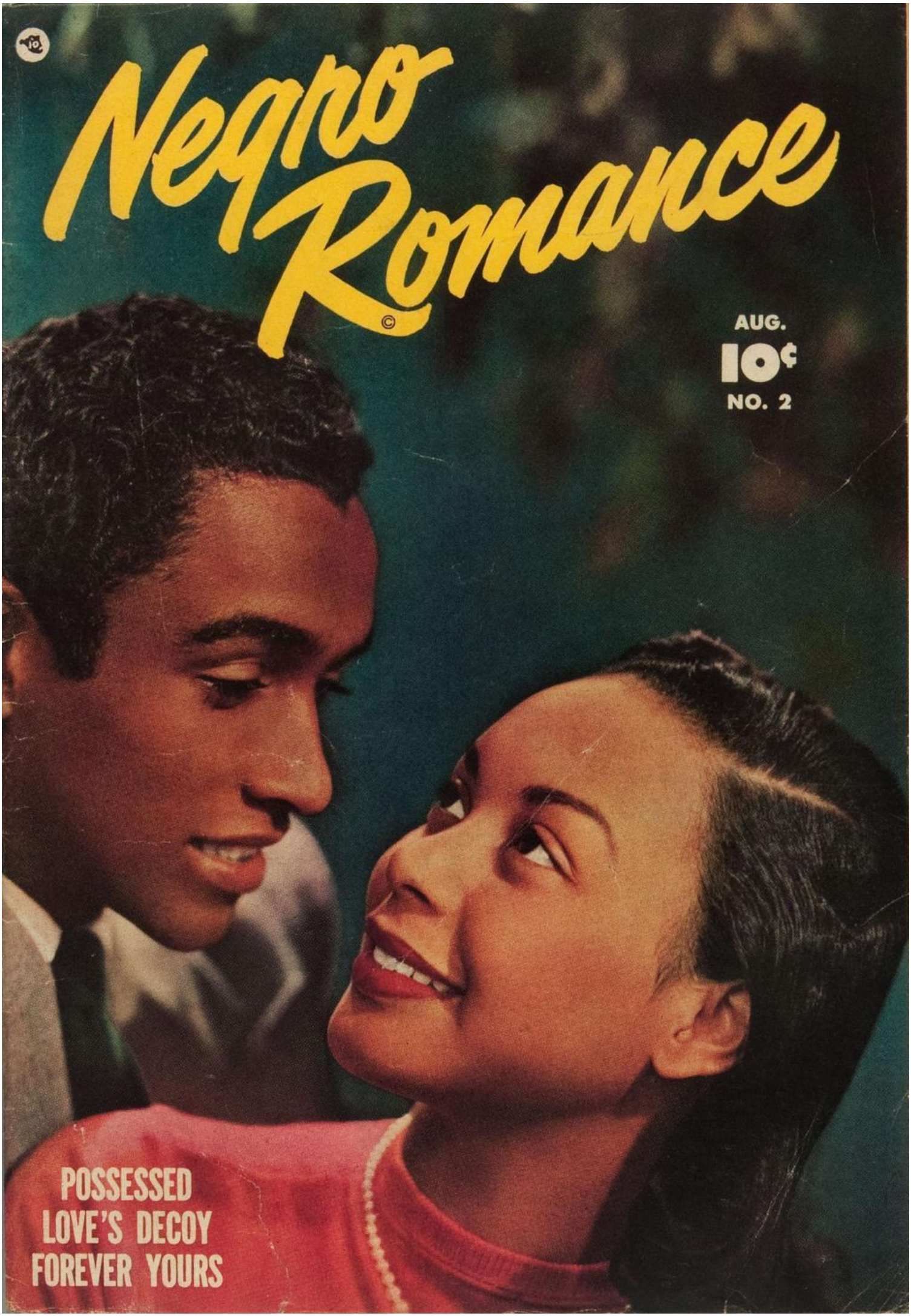
Negro Romance
©
AUG.
10¢
NO. 2
POSSESSED
LOVE'S DECOY
FOREVER YOURS

Exec. Editor, **WILL LIEBERSON**
Art Editor, **AL JETTER**

Negro Romance

Editor, **ROY ALD**
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Possessed

The certainties in life are few--like the rise of the sun, the fall of rain, and the never-ending flow of ocean tides. But even these cannot be anticipated or reckoned upon. And so, living requires courage in the work we undertake and faith in those we love.

But Gloria Conan passed each day with fear, on the fringe of insecurity.

And when love came to her, in all its incomparable wondrousness -- she sought to gather it into her arms and isolate each pulsating moment from the world outside!

I TOLD MY BROTHER EVERYTHING! HOW YOU REGULATED OUR LIVES AND DOMINATED OUR EVERY THOUGHT AND DESIRE! ALL TO FURTHER YOUR OWN SELFISH PLANS!

LLOYD, BELIEVE ME, I DID IT ONLY TO WIN YOUR LOVE -- TO INSURE OUR HAPPINESS!

YOU MIGHT HAVE CHOSEN ANOTHER WAY, GLORIA. THERE'S NOTHING LEFT TO SAY, BUT -- GOODBYE!

I collected my pay envelope with apprehension -- and the little pink slip inside assured me my worst fears were realized. Another job gone --

I'M SORRY, MISS CONAN -- BUSINESS IS SLOW. WE'VE HAD TO LET A LOT OF PEOPLE GO THIS WEEK.

YES, I KNOW. IT'S THE SAME OLD STORY. I'VE HEARD IT BEFORE, AND I KNOW I'LL HEAR IT AGAIN.

RADAR AND COMPANY

And when I walked dejectedly along Corlane Park, opposite the office building, I suppressed resentful tears. It was so miserably hard to dig a root of permanency, to feel sure and settled...

ALL THIS INSECURITY! IS THERE NEVER ANY END TO IT? IS EVERYTHING I WANT EVENTUALLY TO SLIP THROUGH MY FINGERS?

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OH—I'M SORRY, BUT THIS SPACE IS VERY SPECIALLY RESERVED FOR BERTRAM!
BER—? BUT THERE ARE NO RESERVATIONS ON PARK BENCHES!
KEEP OFF

A display of anger at that moment would have helped spend the hurt that was gnawing inside me, Anger at anything or anyone—even the young man on the bench. But his unexpectedly handsome face elicited a far more thrilling reaction. And then...

I'VE BEEN FEEDING SQUIRRELS ON THIS BENCH EVER SINCE I WAS A KID. I CALL THEM ALL BERTRAM—THE CUTE LITTLE BEGGARS!
YES—SO FREE FROM EVERY CARE AND CONCERN! THEY'VE NOT A WORRY IN THE WORLD!

And even as I spoke the words, the tears I had been withholding fell without restraint. Perhaps it was the gentleness in his voice, the understanding in his eyes, that made me talk as to a sympathetic friend...

WELL, SO THAT'S IT! BUT YOU'RE WRONG ABOUT BERTRAM, YOU KNOW. HE'S GOT LOTS OF WORRIES, TOO! THERE'S ALWAYS A HEAVY WINTER TO WORRY ABOUT, AND THE NEXT LOAD OF PEANUTS. AND SNITCHING SQUIRRELS TAPPING HIS SUPPLY!
Y-YOU'RE JUST KIDDING WITH ME...
SURE, BUT I'VE ALWAYS FOUND THAT CHANGES IN LIFE USUALLY LEAD TO SOMETHING BETTER. YOU JUST HAVE TO BELIEVE THAT AND NOT LET EVERY BAD BREAK GET YOU DOWN. INCIDENTALLY, I'M LLOYD JAIMSON...
I—I'M GLORIA CONAN.

I couldn't help responding to his smile—it was as though its warmth mirrored the brightness of the sun. He walked along beside me, and I discovered my heart free of melancholy and prey to a far more inspiring emotion...

I'M SORRY TO HAVE BURDENED YOU WITH MY TROUBLES! YOU'RE ACTUALLY A STRANGER, AND—
THEN FATE MUST HAVE DIRECTED YOU MY WAY! I MIGHT BE ABLE TO GET YOU A JOB. MY MOM WOULD...

He mentioned something about his mother's business being fairly nearby and urged me to come along.

His concern was so genuine and his manner so disarming, I found myself wishing there would be more than a casual goodbye to this meeting. Soon...

THERE! THAT LITTLE BEAUTY SALON! THAT'S MY MOM'S.
B-BUT I DON'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT THAT KIND OF BUSINESS.
ELITE BEAUTY SALON
HELEN ROEBUCK "DAY-DREAMS"
CIGARS CIGARETTES

DON'T WORRY ABOUT THAT! MOM IS A PRETTY WONDERFUL PERSON. IT WOULDN'T TAKE HER MUCH TIME TO GIVE YOU ALL THE KNOW-HOW YOU NEED!
WELL, I--I DON'T KNOW...
ELITE 2ND FLOOR
HILL PHOTOS 3RD FLOOR

He touched my arm as he led me into the small store... and, to me, the gesture seemed to have a special meaning. Or was it simply that I wished it had? It was obvious that Lloyd's mother had not led an easy existence, but the vitality of a still active person was bright in her eyes...

MOM, THIS IS GLORIA CONAN! I JUST MET HER. SHE LOST HER JOB... SHE DOESN'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT THE BEAUTY BUSINESS -- BUT SHE'S READY, WILLING AND ETCETERA!
YOU CERTAINLY DIDN'T WASTE ANY TIME IN GETTING TO KNOW ALL ABOUT HER! JUST LIKE HIS FATHER, THAT ONE!

PERHAPS I SHOULDN'T HAVE COME IN AT ALL. FORGIVE ME --
NONSENSE, MY DEAR! PERHAPS I CAN HELP YOU. OF COURSE, I COULDN'T AFFORD TO PAY YOU VERY MUCH WHILE I'M TEACHING YOU.

I'VE ALWAYS WORKED THE PLACE ALONE -- BUT MAYBE IT'S TIME I TOOK SOMEONE IN. HOW DOES IT SOUND?
I'D BE VERY GRATEFUL, MRS. JAIMSON.
SALON
CIGARS

He insisted on taking me to my house -- and by the time we reached it, he was holding my hand in his. I looked up into the tenderness of his eyes, and my heart whispered a secret question. Had I really met this enchanting man only hours before -- or was it a week -- or a century?

That night, I watched each star blink awake-- and in the aura of its scintillating light I saw the image of Lloyd's face. I was afraid that sleep might steal it away--and prove it all a dream. But in the days to come, I discovered a new and glorious reality. Afternoons, I worked in the salon and, mornings, I met Lloyd in the park --

LLOYD! I WAS ALMOST CERTAIN YOU WOULDN'T BE HERE YET!

NOT A CHANCE! I PLAN ON MAKING THE MOST OF MY EVERY MOMENT WITH YOU!

YOU SAY THINGS SO EASILY AND NATURALLY! I -- I WANT TO BELIEVE THEM, LLOYD,-- VERY MUCH!

MAYBE LETTING YOU INTO THIS LITTLE SECRET WILL BE PROOF ENOUGH! YOU KNOW, I HAD AN ULTERIOR MOTIVE IN CONVINCING MY MOM TO HIRE YOU! IT WAS TO GET YOU TO SHARE THIS BENCH WITH ME EVERY MORNING!

THERE! NOW YOU'VE EVEN WON BERTRAM AWAY FROM ME -- QUITE AN ACCOMPLISHMENT! AND FROM WHAT MOM TELLS ME ABOUT YOUR LEARNING SO REMARKABLY FAST -- UNUSUAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS ARE RIGHT UP YOUR ALLEY!

YOU AND YOUR MOTHER HAVE BEEN SO KIND, LLOYD. I'D LIKE TO FIND A WAY TO SHOW MY GRATITUDE!

I THINK I'LL FIND A WAY FOR YOU. HOW'S THIS FOR A STARTER ?

I waited for his kiss with a breathless eagerness! My lips longing to know if the burning rapture could match my own. But could one measure the intensity of the sun? For now, as his arms embraced me, I knew only that I had lived for this moment alone!

OH, LLOYD---!

DARLING!

MAYBE I SHOULDN'T RUSH YOU LIKE THIS -- BUT I CAN'T HELP THE WAY I FEEL ABOUT YOU!

I DON'T WANT YOU TO, LLOYD. IT'S THE WAY I HOPED YOU WOULD FEEL FROM THE FIRST!

As we walked arm in arm, still under the spell of this blissful moment -- old doubts were resurrected in my mind.

I HAVE A JOB I ENJOY NOW -- AND A MAN I LOVE! BUT I'VE HAD OTHER JOBS -- AND I'VE GONE WITH OTHER MEN! SOMETHING HAS ALWAYS HAPPENED TO DESTROY IT BEFORE! BUT I WON'T PERMIT IT TO HAPPEN THIS TIME! NOT THIS TIME!

THERE--! TELL A GIRL YOU LOVE HER AND HER FACE BECOMES LONGER THAN ROCKEFELLER'S INCOME TAX RETURN! WHY SO SERIOUS ALL OF A SUDDEN, GLORIA?
OH, IT'S NOTHING, DARLING. I WAS JUST THINKING THAT I'D BETTER START FOR THE STORE. IT--IT'S A LITTLE LATE.
My mind was a cauldron of seething anxieties beneath a tense, masked face as Lloyd and I strolled casually to the store.
Lloyd had declared his love--and the job was going well. But now--I pondered--how could I hold them within my grasp forever? There had to be a way! Presently...
SO LONG FOR NOW. I'LL SEE BOTH OF YOU SWEETHEARTS LATER! I PROMISED TO TAKE SIS TO THE MOVIES!
GET, NOW! AND DON'T BE TAKING THE GIRL'S MIND OFF HER WORK!
YOU KNOW, MY DEAR, I REALLY DON'T KNOW WHAT TO TEACH YOU NOW! YOU'VE LEARNED AS MUCH ABOUT HAIR-DRESSING AND BEAUTY TREATMENTS AS I KNOW MYSELF!
IT--IT MIGHT BE NICE IF YOU -- WELL, IF YOU TAUGHT ME SOMETHING ABOUT THE BUSINESS ITSELF. ALL THE DETAILS IN RUNNING THE STORE. I COULD BE MORE OF A HELP TO YOU.
That was the beginning of an idea--or more appropriately, a rather insidious plot to become an indispensible element in the lives of those people around me. At first, I started with the small, incidental things...
WHY, YOU'RE COPYING ALL MY RECORDS INTO A NEW BOOK. IT'S VERY NEAT --BUT I MUST ADMIT THE SYSTEM IS ENTIRELY DIFFERENT FROM MY OWN. I-I DON'T THINK I CAN MAKE HEAD OR TAIL OF IT.
DON'T WORRY ABOUT THAT, MRS. JAIMSON. I'LL BE HERE TO MAKE THE ENTRIES.
Secretly, I subscribed to the new hairstyle magazines, suggesting sophisticated hair arrangements to a younger, newer clientele. Many of the older customers were leaving, and the more recent ones asked for me...
I'VE NEVER SEEN SO MANY STRANGE FACES IN HERE AS I HAVE RECENTLY. AND ALL MY OLD FRIENDS FAIL TO COME AROUND. I CAN'T UNDERSTAND IT.
THERE'S ANOTHER NEW CUSTOMER. I--I WOULDN'T KNOW HOW TO DO HER HAIR. HOW DID YOU LEARN, GLORIA?
OH, I JUST FIGURED IT OUT, I GUESS. DON'T WORRY, MRS. JAIMSON. I'LL TAKE CARE OF THESE FOLKS. YOU CAN GO OUT AND DO SOME SHOPPING OR SOMETHING.

And so it went, my hold becoming even more firm and sure -- so like the spider weaving its web about an unsuspecting victim. The love Lloyd and I now shared became a gayer, brighter, more glorious adventure with each day's passing. But all this was occurring in the summer months of his vacation from college...
I HAVEN'T BEEN ROWING FOR AGES! IT'S HEAVENLY OUT HERE, LLOYD -- WITH YOU!
MORE OF THIS IS JUST WHAT I NEED TO GET ME BACK IN CONDITION TO CAPTAIN THE BOXING TEAM IN SCHOOL AGAIN!
IT HAS ALL BEEN WONDERFUL, GLORIA -- THESE MONTHS WITH YOU! I HATE TO THINK OF LEAVING.
I'LL STILL BE HERE WHEN YOU COME BACK! YOU CAN BE SURE OF THAT!
DO YOU KNOW HOW MUCH YOU'VE COME TO MEAN TO ME, GLORIA?
I'D RATHER YOU TOLD ME, LLOYD -- OVER AND OVER AGAIN!
Each time his lips met mine, the sensation was tremblingly, ecstatically new! It was as if his kiss created a far greater capacity to feel and sense -- to be wondrously alive! "I love you, I love you!" rhymed the quickening beat of my heart!
OH, LLOYD -- YOU'RE EVERYTHING I'VE EVER WANTED!
DEAREST--!
EDITH AND NEIL ARE COMING! WE DON'T WANT TO SET THEM A BAD EXAMPLE!
NEIL AND THAT SISTER OF MINE ARE CRAZY ABOUT EACH OTHER! THEY'RE SETTING THEIR OWN EXAMPLES BY NOW!
HI, THERE! I'LL RACE YOU TO THE END OF THE LAKE!
OKAY! YOU'RE ON! HOLD TIGHT, EDITH!
There was music in the motion of his lithe, muscular torso as the boat fairly leaped through the waters.
He seemed like a Grecian statue sprung to life -- and the pride of my possession knew no bounds!
And when the evening came to an end...
DARLING, IT WAS A PERFECT DAY! THE BEST KIND OF DAY FOR THE MEMORY OF A GOODBYE! YOU SEE, I'M LEAVING FOR SCHOOL TOMORROW -- BUT I DIDN'T WANT TO SPOIL THE DAY BY TELLING YOU EARLIER!
LEAVING SO SOON?

DON'T SAY IT LIKE THAT, DARLING! THIS IS NOT THE END FOR US!
NO -- I'LL SEE TO THAT!
As soon as Lloyd left, I began in earnest to take hold of the things around me. When he returned, I'd leave him no alternative but to walk back into my arms!
WHAT IS THAT, GLORIA?
OH, THAT'S THE NEW PIECE OF EQUIPMENT I SUGGESTED WE BUY LAST MONTH.
I SUPPOSE I REALLY OUGHT TO LEARN TO USE THIS FROM THE BEGINNING WITH YOU. I SEEM TO BE FALLING BEHIND IN SO MANY THINGS.
NOW, DON'T YOU BOTHER YOUR HEAD ABOUT IT, MRS. JAIMSON! YOU'RE NOT AS YOUNG AS YOU USED TO BE AND YOU NEED MORE REST THAN YOU'VE BEEN GETTING.
AND ANOTHER THING! EDITH MIGHT BENEFIT WITH A BIT MORE ATTENTION FROM YOU. AT THAT AGE, MOST GIRLS NEED LOTS OF SUPERVISION. THE BUSINESS HASN'T GIVEN YOU MUCH TIME FOR HER!
I -- I NEVER THOUGHT OF IT THAT WAY. EDITH ALWAYS SEEMED SO WELL ADJUSTED I NEVER CONSIDERED IT. PERHAPS YOU'RE RIGHT, THOUGH...
OF COURSE, I AM! YOUR DAUGHTER COMES FIRST! NOW GET YOUR COAT AND GO RIGHT HOME. WITH ME AROUND, YOU CAN COME IN LATER AND LEAVE EARLIER EACH DAY!
I REALLY DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO, GLORIA.
YOU GO RIGHT AHEAD NOW, AND LEARN TO BECOME A LADY OF LEISURE. FROM NOW ON, THERE'LL BE LOTS OF IT FOR YOU!

And from that day, Mrs. Jaimson rarely set foot in the store.

By now the shop was so changed that she felt like an utter stranger inside it.

I would drop by the house and deliver the proceeds from the store...

OH, GLORIA -- I'M GLAD YOU COULD COME. I-I'M AFRAID I'VE BEEN A LITTLE LONELY.
YOU'RE JUST TOO ACCUSTOMED TO WORKING YOURSELF TO EXHAUSTION. YOU'LL GET USED TO THIS. THE STORE DID VERY WELL THIS WEEK, AS YOU CAN SEE FOR YOURSELF! I'M THINKING OF CHANGING THE LOCATION -- BUT WE'LL TALK ABOUT THAT LATER!

ISN'T EDITH HOME AT THIS HOUR? YOU DON'T PERMIT HER TO STAY OUT THIS LATE, DO YOU?
IT'S SATURDAY NIGHT -- AND NEIL IS SUCH A FINE BOY. I -- I DIDN'T SEE ANY HARM IN IT!

Eventually, I did change the location of the store. Now I began dropping over for dinner almost regularly at Mrs. Jaimson's.

The kernel of another plan began to take root...

YOU'RE NOT LOOKING AT ALL WELL, MRS. JAIMSON. I THINK YOU NEED MORE LOOKING AFTER. PERHAPS I OUGHT TO MOVE IN AND HELP.
OH, NO, MY DEAR -- THERE'S REALLY VERY LITTLE TO DO. BUT IF YOU WANTED TO LIVE HERE, WE'D BE GLAD TO HAVE YOU.

THEN IT'S ALL SETTLED! I'LL BE HERE BESIDE YOU ALL THE TIME NOW! NOW, EDITH CAN HELP ME CLEAN THE TABLE!
IT REALLY ISN'T NECESSARY. I ENJOY DOING THESE THINGS -- REALLY.

I... I DON'T MIND HELPING, GLORIA -- BUT I'VE A DATE WITH NEIL.
DON'T YOU THINK YOUR MOTHER'S HEALTH IS FAR MORE IMPORTANT? HE'LL JUST HAVE TO WAIT. BESIDES -- IT DOESN'T SEEM RIGHT GOING OUT WITH HIM SO OFTEN AT YOUR AGE!

And my next maneuver was managed very adeptly. I arose early, attended to household chores and shopping and left for the business. I returned in time to help prepare the dinner, insisting that Edith do what I couldn't have time for. Now even household accounts became exclusively my own affair...

DID YOU SEE WHAT I SAVED YOU THIS PAST WEEK ON HOUSEHOLD EXPENSES?

YOU DO ARRANGE THINGS VERY EFFICIENTLY, GLORIA. B-BUT I REALLY THINK YOU ARE DOING TOO MUCH.

OH, THERE YOU ARE! YOU'VE BEEN GONE ALL DAY. I WONDERED WHERE YOU WERE.

I FOUND A NICE PART-TIME JOB. NOW THAT I'M GETTING OUT OF SCHOOL IN A MONTH, I'LL NEED IT.

THAT'S NONSENSE. THE BEAUTY PARLOR IS SUFFICIENT WITHOUT YOU WORKING. YOUR MOTHER'S WELFARE IS FAR MORE IMPORTANT THAN YOUR WORKING AT ALL. IT WOULD BE BETTER TO REMAIN WITH HER ALL DAY.

NO, MY DEAR... THAT WON'T BE NECESSARY. I'M NOT ILL, YOU KNOW.

But I was embarrassingly persistent with Edith until she surrendered to my wishes. It was to my advantage that everyone was dependent upon me--and that the little Jaimson world revolved around Gloria Conan! Any interfering elements were rudely brushed aside...

NO, YOU CANNOT COME IN TO SEE EDITH! SHE IS CARING FOR HER MOTHER, WHO IS NOT AT ALL WELL!

BUT THAT'S WHAT YOU'VE BEEN TELLING ME EVERY EVENING FOR A WEEK! COULDN'T I JUST TALK TO HER?

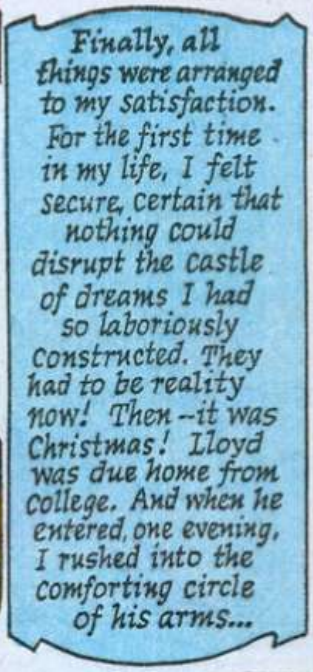
I'M SORRY--THAT'S FINAL! GOOD NIGHT!

GLORIA, WAS THAT NEIL? IT SOUNDED LIKE HIS VOICE!

YES--IT WAS NEIL! BUT I TOLD HIM YOU WERE MUCH TOO OCCUPIED WITH YOUR MOTHER! OR ISN'T YOUR MOTHER THAT IMPORTANT?

OF COURSE, GLORIA--BUT... OH, WELL, NEVER MIND!

I turned Neil away repeatedly--until at last, he failed to come at all...
SOB... HE DOESN'T STOP BY OR CALL ANYMORE! ...SOB...
IT ISN'T WORTH ALL THOSE TEARS. YOU'RE REALLY TOO YOUNG TO BE SERIOUS ANYWAY!


Finally, all things were arranged to my satisfaction. For the first time in my life, I felt secure, certain that nothing could disrupt the castle of dreams I had so laboriously constructed. They had to be reality now! Then--it was Christmas! Lloyd was due home from college. And when he entered, one evening, I rushed into the comforting circle of his arms...

MOM! SIS! MERRY CHRISTMAS! SAY--WHAT'S ALL THE GLOOM ABOUT? YOU DON'T LOOK AT ALL HAPPY!
OH, YOU'RE JUST IMAGINING IT, SON! EVERYTHING IS FINE... JUST FINE!

WELL! LOOK AT THIS! THE HOUSE IS ALL CHANGED AROUND! I'D NEVER RECOGNIZE IT MYSELF!
YOU'LL GET USED TO IT QUICKLY ENOUGH, DEAR. NOW, LET ME HAVE YOUR THINGS!

GOSH, I'M SORRY! MY EXCITEMENT MADE ME FORGET TO INTRODUCE SARA DECULLEN, A FELLOW-STUDENT I INVITED TO SPEND THE HOLIDAYS WITH US -- AND MEET YOU ALL!

It was as though an ungloved hand had slapped me savagely across the face! He'd brought a girl home from school with him! A beautiful, demure creature who followed his every move with unconcealed admiration in her young face! I fought for self-control...

I closed the door and turned upon Lloyd with a vehemence that left him stunned...
AFTER ALL I'VE DONE, YOU HAVE THE GALL TO BRING THAT GIRL HOME -- INTO THIS HOUSE -- AND PARADE HER BEFORE ME! IS THAT THE MEASURE OF YOUR GRATITUDE?
GRATITUDE? WHAT ARE TALKING ABOUT, GLORIA?
I'M TALKING ABOUT HAVING BEEN A NURSE TO YOUR MOTHER AND TO EDITH! AND A SLAVISH MAID HERE AROUND THE HOUSE! I'VE RUN THE BUSINESS BY MYSELF AND COOKED MEALS -- AND -- ! WELL, I EVEN SENT YOU THE MONEY AT SCHOOL! AND FOR ALL THIS I TOOK VIRTUALLY NOTHING! DO YOU REALIZE YOU OWE ME THOUSANDS?
WHILE YOU'RE TALKING, GLORIA -- TELL HIM HOW YOU INACTIVATED MOTHER! HOW YOU CHASED NEIL AWAY! HOW YOU REFUSED TO PERMIT ANYONE TO MAKE A MOVE THAT WOULD LESSEN YOUR AUTHORITY! YOU WANTED A HOLD ON US -- ON LLOYD -- WE COULD NEVER BREAK!
NO -- ! NO! YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU ARE SAYING!
I UNDERSTAND A LOT OF THINGS NOW! MOTHER'S STRANGELY DISHEARTENING LETTERS -- THE ATTITUDE YOU'VE ALWAYS HAD ABOUT BEING UNSURE OF YOURSELF! I INVITED SARA TO MEET YOU, THE WONDERFUL GIRL I PLANNED TO MARRY. I THOUGHT YOU COULD HELP HER, COMFORT HER.
He told me about the girl then. Her fiance', Lloyd's roommate, had been killed in an accident a week before. He'd asked her home because he thought I was a fine enough person to be able to help her, console her in her loss. And now, the anger in Lloyd's face tore at my heart...
SO WE ARE GREATLY IN DEBT TO YOU! WELL -- TAKE THE SHOP TO CLEAR THAT UP! IT'S YOURS! AND LEAVE THE HOUSE -- WE NEVER WANT TO SEE YOU AGAIN!
The sobs that choked inside me were too unbearable to find release. All that I'd planned and prayed and hoped for -- had eluded me in the heart-rending interval of an instant! I packed my suitcase and left the house, still unable to comprehend the complete tragedy that had disrupted my life!
...SOB... THIS CAN'T BE THE END OF EVERYTHING! ...SOB... IT CAN'T REALLY BE HAPPENING!

The whistling wintry wind seemed to be a lashing recrimination! Without knowing my destination, my stumbling legs chose a familiar path to the beauty salon! The only place of refuge I knew now!

I could have tried to hold love with love itself--but no! I had sought to imprison love--keep it entrapped with deceit and indebtedness. The weeks that passed were the most miserable of my life. I realized then, I could not go on with the burden of such a wrong in my heart...

EDITH--I'VE BEEN WAITING HERE, HOPING YOU'D COME OUT. I WANT TO TALK TO YOU!
WHAT DO YOU WANT NOW? HAVEN'T YOU DONE ENOUGH?
I--I WANT TO MAKE UP FOR ALL THE HURT I'VE CAUSED! I'LL TALK TO NEIL--EXPLAIN . . . HOW--
BUT YOU'RE TOO LATE. LLOYD HAS GONE OUT OF TOWN TO FIND A WAY TO SUPPORT US!
NO...SOB... I-I NEVER EXPECT TO WIN LLOYD BACK! I-I WAS UNWORTHY OF HIS LOVE! AS I WAS OF THE TRUST OF YOUR MOTHER. I-I PROMISE TO GO AWAY FOREVER--IF ONLY YOU'LL LISTEN TO ME!
W-WHAT IS IT?

I told Edith she was old enough to run the shop herself now. I would show her everything about it. And she could bring her mother back into the business! It was theirs--not mine! And during the next weeks, I worked and worked with her until she was ready. That was my cue to leave...

YOU CAN RUN IT WITHOUT A HITCH NOW, I'M SURE! AND YOUR MOTHER WILL FEEL BETTER WHEN SHE GETS BACK TO WORK AGAIN! I--I HOPE EVERYTHING TURNS OUT WELL...
GLORIA--I-I'M SORRY ALL THIS HAD TO HAPPEN.
AND YOU KNOW, I--I DID SPEAK TO NEIL AS I PROMISED. GOODBYE NOW, EDITH... SOB.
G-GOODBYE, GLORIA...
ELITE BEAUTY SALON

I went to another town, found another job--and in the months to follow, I wearily went through the motions of living. Without Lloyd, everything seemed futile, hopeless.

Then, one day, I passed a boxing arena, and on the poster...

LLOYD'S FIGHTING HERE! AND TONIGHT!

BOXIN

ROWLEY ARENA

10 ROUNDS

LLOYD "STOPPER" JA

VS

SLAPSY-JACK GRADY

6 OTHER BOUT

STELLAR PERFORM

THURSDAY, M

The pain throbbed through the numbed hurt inside me--and the tears fell anew! "Lloyd! Lloyd!" Over and over again, my lips whispered his name. I ran back to the hotel, determined not to see him fight that evening. But the longing to see his face, even from afar, was a desire too strong to deny...

...SOB... I LOVE HIM SO! I-I'LL NEVER FORGET HIM AS LONG AS I LIVE!... SOB...

THE WINNER! LLOYD "STOPPER" JAIMSON!

SOB... I'LL STAND BY THE DRESSING ROOM FOR A CLOSER GLIMPSE OF HIM! I-I WON'T LET HIM SEE ME!

OH! IT'S THAT GIRL LLOYD BROUGHT HOME WITH HIM! AND SHE'S NOTICED ME! MAYBE LLOYD MARRIED HER! I'D BETTER LEAVE!

My heart was wildly beating as I started away! She'd mention my name to him--and perhaps they'd laugh! I cried bitterly! Then I heard a voice calling after me, and I turned...

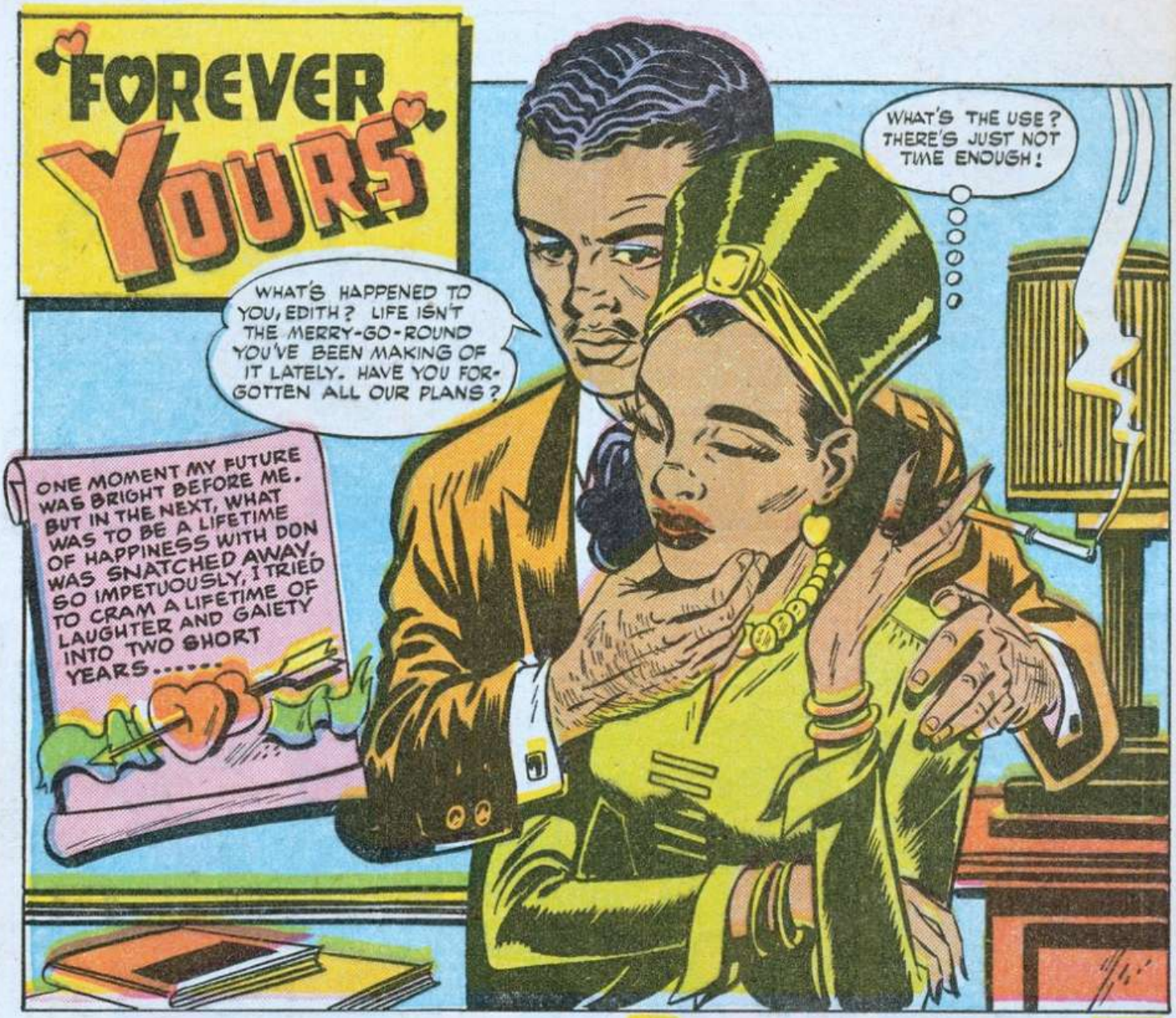
GLORIA! WAIT-- WAIT!

LLOYD -- D-DON'T SAY ANYTHING AND HURT ME! PLEASE--!

DOES WANTING YOU BACK IN MY ARMS HURT YOU, GLORIA? I'VE BEEN TRYING DESPERATELY TO LOCATE YOU IN EVERY WAY I KNEW HOW! YOU'VE MADE UP FOR PAST MISTAKES!

OH, MY DARLING! MY DARLING! I THOUGHT YOU AND THAT GIRL WERE-- WERE MARRIED!

SHE IS, AND LIVING HAPPILY IN THIS TOWN! SHE TOLD ME SHE SAW YOU! I'M GOING BACK TO SCHOOL FOR MY LAST SEMESTER-- AND THEN WE'LL BE MARRIED!


FOREVER YOURS
WHAT'S HAPPENED TO YOU, EDITH? LIFE ISN'T THE MERRY-GO-ROUND YOU'VE BEEN MAKING OF IT LATELY. HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN ALL OUR PLANS?
ONE MOMENT MY FUTURE WAS BRIGHT BEFORE ME. BUT IN THE NEXT, WHAT WAS TO BE A LIFETIME OF HAPPINESS WITH DON WAS SNATCHED AWAY. SO IMPETUOUSLY, I TRIED TO CRAM A LIFETIME OF LAUGHTER AND GAIETY INTO TWO SHORT YEARS.....
WHAT'S THE USE? THERE'S JUST NOT TIME ENOUGH!

MY LIFE WAS PLANNED DOWN TO THE LAST DETAIL. DON AND I HAD BEEN GOING TOGETHER FOR THREE YEARS NOW, AND AS I SAID GOOD NIGHT, THE WHOLE WORLD WAS A BRIGHT PROMISE BEFORE ME...

WELL, DARLING, THE WAITING IS BEHIND US. NOW THAT I'VE FINISHED SCHOOL AND ESTABLISHED MYSELF, WE CAN PLAN OUR WEDDING.
YES, DARLING, NOTHING CAN STOP US NOW!

BUT I WAS SOON TO REALIZE THE BITTER IRONY OF THE WORDS MY LIPS HAD SO UNWITTINGLY UTTERED...FOREVER YOURS! THAT SAME WEEK, I WAS BOTHERED AGAIN BY THE PERSISTENT HEADACHES I SUFFERED FROM TIME TO TIME SO I WENT TO DOC MARTIN FOR A CHECK-UP...

WELL, WHAT, IS IT? YOU LOOK SO SERIOUS, DOCTOR.
IT'S SOMETHING TO BE SERIOUS ABOUT. I'VE BEEN YOUR DOCTOR FOR A LONG TIME, EDITH, AND I KNOW I CAN SPEAK PLAINLY.

YOU'RE SERIOUSLY ILL, EDITH. I'D SAY OFF-HAND, THAT UNLESS YOU UNDERGO EXPERT CARE AND MEDICAL TREATMENT, YOUR CONDITION WILL PROVE FATAL IN TWO YEARS.

I FELT THE WHOLE WORLD FALLING AWAY BENEATH MY FEET. FOR A BREATHLESS MOMENT MY HEART STOOD STILL, THEN RACED MADLY ON WITH A THROBBING THAT SEEMED TO ECHO THOSE HEART-RENDING WORDS....

I WALKED FOR HOURS NOT KNOWING OR CARING WHERE MY AIMLESS FEET CARRIED ME. IN ONE SHORT MOMENT I WAS CALLED ON TO CHANGE THE ENTIRE COURSE OF MY LIFE. THE SUDDEN SHOCK WAS ALMOST TOO MUCH TO BEAR...

THERE ON THE HIGH BRIDGE, THE CHILL WIND BLOWING ON MY FEVERISH FACE, I WAS MOMENTARILY REVIVED...

SHOULD I GO TO DON... TELL HIM EVERY THING? NO! WHAT COULD I EXPECT HIM TO SAY? I'VE GOT TO FACE IT... WHO WOULD WANT ANYTHING TO DO WITH A HOPELESS INVALID?

AND WHAT IS LEFT? A SANATORIUM... PERHAPS YEARS OF SUFFERING... A LIVING DEATH? NO! IT'S BETTER TO TAKE THE MOMENTS I HAVE LEFT AND FILL THEM WITH LAUGHTER!

AND SO IT WAS THAT I MADE MY DECISION. DETERMINED TO SEE IT THROUGH, I FOUGHT BACK THE TEARS AS I PACED THE FLOOR IN THE STILLNESS OF MY ROOM THAT NIGHT...
I'VE GOT TO FORGET THE PAST... BLOT IT OUT OF MY MIND! TOMORROW I BEGIN A NEW LIFE!

I DREW THE SHADE... AND IT WAS ALMOST A SYMBOL OF SHUTTING OUT MY PAST LIFE!

THE NEXT DAY I MET DON FOR OUR USUAL DATE. WE WENT FOR A WALK AS WE HAD DONE SO OFTEN IN THE PAST. BUT THIS ONCE ENJOYABLE PASTIME IRRITATED ME NOW AS WE STROLLED LEISURELY ALONG...

I GUESS IT HAS BEEN KIND OF DULL FOR YOU. ALL RIGHT, TONIGHT'S YOUR NIGHT! WHERE SHALL WE GO?
ANYWHERE! JUST SO THERE ARE PEOPLE AND MUSIC AND FUN!

WE WENT OUT THAT NIGHT, AND I TRIED HARD TO LAUGH. THERE COULD BE NO MOMENTS FOR SORROW AND NO TIME FOR TEARS TO OBSCURE THE BRIGHTNESS OF THE LIGHTS THAT SYMBOLIZED LIFE AND GAIETY FOR ME...

WELL, IT'S A GOOD THING TOMORROW IS THE WEEK END AND I CAN SLEEP LATE!
NO, DARLING, I'VE GOT OTHER PLANS! TOMORROW WE'LL GET AN EARLY START!

DON STARED AT ME INTENTLY. HE COULD FATHOM SOME THING WAS WRONG. HIS VOICE WAS FULL OF CONCERN AS HE SPOKE..

WE WENT OUT THE NEXT MORNING, AND IN THE DAYS THAT FOLLOWED, THERE WAS NOT ONE DULL MOMENT. THEN, ONE AFTERNOON, AT THE WHEEL OF DON'S CAR, I THREW CAUTION TO THE WIND AS WE RACED DOWN THE HIGHWAY. WHY NOT? ALL LIFE HAD INCREASED ITS PACE.... EVERYTHING HAD SPEEDED UP FOR ME..

JUST IN TIME, DON GRABBED THE WHEEL AND SWERVED OUT OF THE PATH OF THE ONRUSHING TRUCK. HIS VOICE WAS TREMBLING WITH ANGER AS HE PULLED OFF THE ROAD AND STOPPED...

IT'S NOT LIKE YOU TO ACT THIS WAY, DARLING. I CAN'T FIGURE IT OUT, BUT THERE'S SOMETHING DIFFERENT ABOUT YOU!
I WISH YOU WOULDN'T TRY TO ANALYZE ME! WE'RE NOT MARRIED YET. I WANT TO ENJOY LIFE... EVERY MOMENT, THAT'S ALL!

NO MATTER WHAT YOU SAY, SOMETHING IS WRONG! MAYBE I OUGHT TO TAKE YOU TO SEE DOC MARTIN. YOU CAN'T BE FEELING WELL!
NO! HE MUSTN'T FIND OUT!

WITH AN EFFORT TO CURB THE TENSION WITHIN ME THAT PULLED MY TAUT NERVES ALMOST TO THE BREAKING POINT, I TURNED TO DON, MY VOICE FULL OF CONTRITION....

GENTLY, DON PULLED ME TO HIM AND SOOTHED MY JANGLED NERVES WITH TENDER WORDS OF AFFECTION. I FELT THE UPSURGE OF LOVE DEEP WITHIN MY HEART AS HIS LIPS MET MINE IN A PASSIONATE KISS....

NOW, DARLING, TAKE ME TO THE BLUE ANGEL CAFE. I'VE HEARD IT'S LOTS OF FUN!
THE BLUE ANGEL! BUT THAT'S JUST A COMMON ROAD HOUSE! CERTAINLY NOT THE KIND OF PLACE I CAN TAKE YOU, EDITH!

JUST FOR THE NOVELTY, DON. AT LEAST WE CAN SEE WHAT IT'S LIKE.
WELL... I SUPPOSE WE COULD LOOK IN FOR A MINUTE. ALL RIGHT, EDITH, IF YOU REALLY WANT TO GO.

BUT I WAS BECOMING TIRED OF PERSUASION. THIS WAS TRULY THE ONLY WAY LEFT FOR ME.

A SHORT TIME LATER..

ONCE I WOULD HAVE REVOLTED, BUT NOW ONLY ARTIFICIAL THRILLS WERE LEFT. I SAW THE MAN WATCHING MY EVERY MOVE. THEN...

DON STARED AT ME AS THOUGH I WERE AS COMPLETE A STRANGER TO HIM AS THE MAN WHO HELD ME IN HIS ARMS. I COULD FEEL THE MUTE QUESTIONING OF HIS EYES....

BUT THEN CAME THE RUDE AWAKENING AT THE ROUGH HANDLING OF THE MAN WHOSE ARMS WERE AROUND ME. I HAD NOT NOTICED HIS FACE BEFORE, BUT NOW IT WAS OBVIOUS HE HAD BEEN DRINKING TOO MUCH.....

DON RUSHED OUT ON THE FLOOR. HE WHIRLED MY ANNOYER AROUND AND IN THE SAME MOTION LASHED OUT WITH HIS FIST...

DON TRIED HARD TO REASON WITH ME, BUT THE TENSION RISING IN ME LIKE A DAMMED-UP RIVER BURST INTO HYSTERIA. ----

I DON'T WANT TO STAND HERE WASTING TIME ARGUING! I CAME HERE FOR A GOOD TIME AND I'M GOING TO HAVE IT!
SO UNDERSTANDING EACH OTHER IS A WASTE OF TIME? SOMEWHERE ALONG THE LINE I LOST TRACK OF YOU, EDITH---- LOST TRACK OF OUR LOVE!

WHEN DON TURNED HIS BACK ON ME, ALL MY PAST LIFE WITH ITS HOPES AND DREAMS SEEMED TO BE LEAVING WITH HIM, YET------

THAT WAS THE BEGINNING. NIGHT AFTER NIGHT I CAME HOME ALL HOURS OF THE MORNING, BUT THE PACE I HAD SET HAD ITS EFFECT. I WAS WEAKER NOW, AND SO VERY WEARY. I KNEW NOW IT WAS FUTILE TO TRY TO FORGET, USELESS TO TRY TO LOCK LOVE OUT OF MY HEART, FOR ALWAYS THE THOUGHT OF DON WAS UPPERMOST IN MY MIND----

ONE DAY, I PASSED DON ON THE STEPS, WORDLESSLY AS I HAD FOR SEVERAL MONTHS, BUT SUDDENLY A DEEP BOTTOMLESS NAUSEA ENVELOPED ME AND I WAS FALLING THROUGH ENDLESS SPACE....

FOR A DIZZYING MOMENT THE WHOLE WORLD SEEMED TO BE ENGULFED IN A VAST SEA AS IN THE BIBLICAL FLOOD OF NOAH'S DAY... LIKE EVERYTHING ELSE, I TOO WAS COMPLETELY SUBMERGED.. BUT AS I STRUGGLED TO THE SURFACE I SAW THAT IT WAS NOT WATER BUT A FLOOD OF HUMAN TEARS... I OPENED MY EYES....

BUT YOU OWED ME THAT! IT'S AN OBLIGATION OF LOVE ITSELF TO SHARE TRAGEDY AS WELL AS HAPPINESS. TO DENY IT IS A KIND OF DISHONESTY!

AT THAT MOMENT, THINGS APPEARED ALMOST HOPELESS. I WAS WEAK AND VERY ILL, FOR I HAD DONE A LOT OF DAMAGE TO MY HEALTH. BUT IN DOC MARTIN'S EYES I SAW A CHANCE FOR ME.. AND I REALIZED THAT WITH DON'S LOVE I WOULD NOT LET THIS CHANCE GO BY!

NEGRO ROMANCE

COME HOME, MY HEART

By Lee Lacey

VIRGINIA put the record on the machine, switched it to "play," and went back to her dressing. It was almost time for Jim Bennett to call for her. He was late tonight, probably because of his job at the mill—it was a good job, and a steady one, and he put in a lot of overtime—but she knew he would be along soon. Tonight was a very special night.

Behind her a muted trumpet sobbed into the opening bars of an ancient jazz number—*Come Home, My Heart.* The record was old and worn, but still there was a sweet poignancy in the tune that caught at Virginia's heart and set her feet to tapping on the rug. That was Slats White on the trumpet. He was playing especially for her!

The music stopped and a firm masculine voice said: "Hello, Virginia. This is Slats speaking. I'm lonesome for you, baby. Been missing you something terrible! It's late and we just finished playing a dance and were walking down the street. I saw this little recording shop. Got my old trumpet with me, and so I'm going to do the record for you. The number you like so well. I'll send it to you first thing in the morning, Special Delivery! Here's love, honey. Goodbye . . ."

The trumpet began its sweet song again. It soared and soared into the upper register, and ended in one long paean of music, sweet and hot and a little sad. Virginia played the record over again. How well she remembered the night, two years ago, when she had met Slats White. Harold White, his real name was, and even then he had been on the way to the top of the band world. He'd played a week's engagement in her little town—a week that passed like a whirlwind, full of fun and laughter and promises. And, when the week was over, one long kiss on the station platform.

Two weeks later she had received the record, Special Delivery, and then a few letters. Then only silence. A year passed and she met Jim. Sweet, hard-working Jim, with all his love and his desire to take care of her forever.

Jim's loud knocking disturbed her reverie, and in her hurry to answer it, she forgot to turn off the record player. The trumpet was filling the room again as she opened the door.

Jim came into the living room, looking tall and well-groomed in his new suit. He kissed her. "About ready, honey? The dance starts in half an hour, you know, Sorry I was late, but some of the lathes broke down, and I was the only one who knew how to fix them. Means a little more on my pay, too."

Virginia started for the record player, but Jim said, "No! Leave it alone, honey. Let me hear him play that old tune. Hmmm—he sure can blow a mean trumpet. Hope he plays as well at the dance tonight!"

Together they listened as the trumpet ceased, and Slats repeated the words once more. Jim said nothing, just waited until the record ended, then walked over and clicked it off. Waiting, Virginia felt a tenseness growing in her. Tonight, she knew, was going to be special in more ways than one. This scene—the one she felt brewing now—had always been inevitable. She was glad that it had come at last. But to her surprise Jim said nothing, except, "Let's go if you're ready, sweetheart. No use missing any of Slat's music—not at the price I had to pay for the tickets."

On the way downtown, Virginia studied Jim from her corner of the taxi. It just wasn't natural the way he acted, had always acted, about that record. Several times she had watched him take it in his big hands, and once she had thought he was going to smash it, but he never said anything. *Not once!* Not even when she played it deliberately, over and over, trying to evoke some comment from him. And tonight, with Slats back in town again, she had been sure that Jim would say something. Anything! But no . . . nothing but admiration for Slats' trumpet playing. How could he really love her and be so indifferent?

She said, "We don't have to go to the dance, Jim. There are lots of other places where we could have just as much fun."

He stared at her in amazement. "Not go to

the dance? But, honey, look who's playing. Slats White! And everyone we know will be there. Why, his is the best band we've had in this town all year. Don't you *want* to see him?"

Suddenly she knew the answer. After two years she knew it. No! She never wanted to see Slats White again. She wanted Jim. Only Jim, and the future they'd planned together. She tried to tell him. "Jim, darling. About that —that old record. You know I just keep it as a sort of souvenir, don't you? It doesn't mean anything to me. I was just thinking, before you came, that it's getting worn out and maybe I should throw it away . . ."

He grinned and patted her hand. "Suit yourself, darling. I don't care. Gosh, surely you don't think I'm jealous of an old record. Keep it if you want it—or throw it away."

Virginia was silent the rest of the way downtown. So he didn't care! Her heart suddenly turned to lead. She had been a fool about that record, about Jim, about everything. Perhaps if she had brought up the matter sooner, had broken the record in front of Jim as a sort of symbol, a token of her love. There was only one reason for his indifference about the record, she knew. Jim no longer loved her, didn't want to marry her. But he was a gentleman, he was kind, and he couldn't bring himself to tell her.

Still another thought, more chilling even than the first, crowded into her mind. It was Jim, all along, who had been so insistent on going to this dance! He *wanted* her to see Slats again. He was *hoping* that she and Slats would pick up where they had left off so long ago. That way Jim would be in the clear, free, and with an untroubled conscience. Virginia felt the slow seep of tears behind her eyelids. She had lost him.

The dance floor was jammed. Couples bumped and crowded each other in a frantic effort to dance on the postage stamp space allotted them. Only once did Jim and Virginia dance past the band and then, although she forced herself to look up into the glare of blue spotlights, Slats White had his back turned. From the rear he looked the same, tall and square-shouldered, with long, nimble-fingered hands that seemed to pull the music from the instruments.

During the intermission Virginia said: "Let's go home, Jim. I'm awfully tired."

His smile was gone. There was an odd look of strain on his face, as though he also were tired. But he shook his head. "Not yet, baby. I've got something to do first. You just sit tight and wait for me."

She watched him walk away in the crowd, tall and strong, thinking that this is the way a girl's heart gets broken.

In a moment Jim was back. He had someone with him. It was Slats White!

Virginia heard her heart give a little cry. So she had been right! Jim was deliberately throwing them together. It was his way of saying goodbye to her, of telling her she could have her record, and her memories, and Slats. Only she didn't want Slats. She wanted Jim. She had always wanted Jim . . .

Jim was talking now. "I want you to meet Miss Sanders, Mr. White. She likes your music very much. Especially an old record of yours that she treasures."

Slats White bowed to Virginia. He looked old and he was gray at the temples. Virginia, her lips stiff as cardboard, smiled back at him. So Jim *had* been jealous, had hated the record..

Slats White said, "Hello, Miss Sanders. It's always nice to hear that people like my music . . ."

He went on talking, but Virginia did not hear him. That first look and his first words had been enough. That, and Jim smiling at her in the background.

Slat's didn't even know her. And surprisingly she didn't care! Only Jim was important.

WHEN they got back to her house Jim explained. "I had to be sure, honey. No man wants to marry a girl that's all wrapped up in memories of someone else. Of course I was jealous. But only a darn fool would be jealous of a record, or even talk about it. And if you still loved Slats—well, that was that! But I had to know. So I took a chance and introduced him to you tonight. I planned it weeks ago, when I first heard he was coming here to play."

He grinned and wiped his brow in an exaggerated gesture. "Whewww—that was a bad minute. Suppose you'd fallen into his arms."

He kissed her, a long kiss. Then: "There's just one other thing, sweetheart. Now, after all this time, I'd like to . . ."

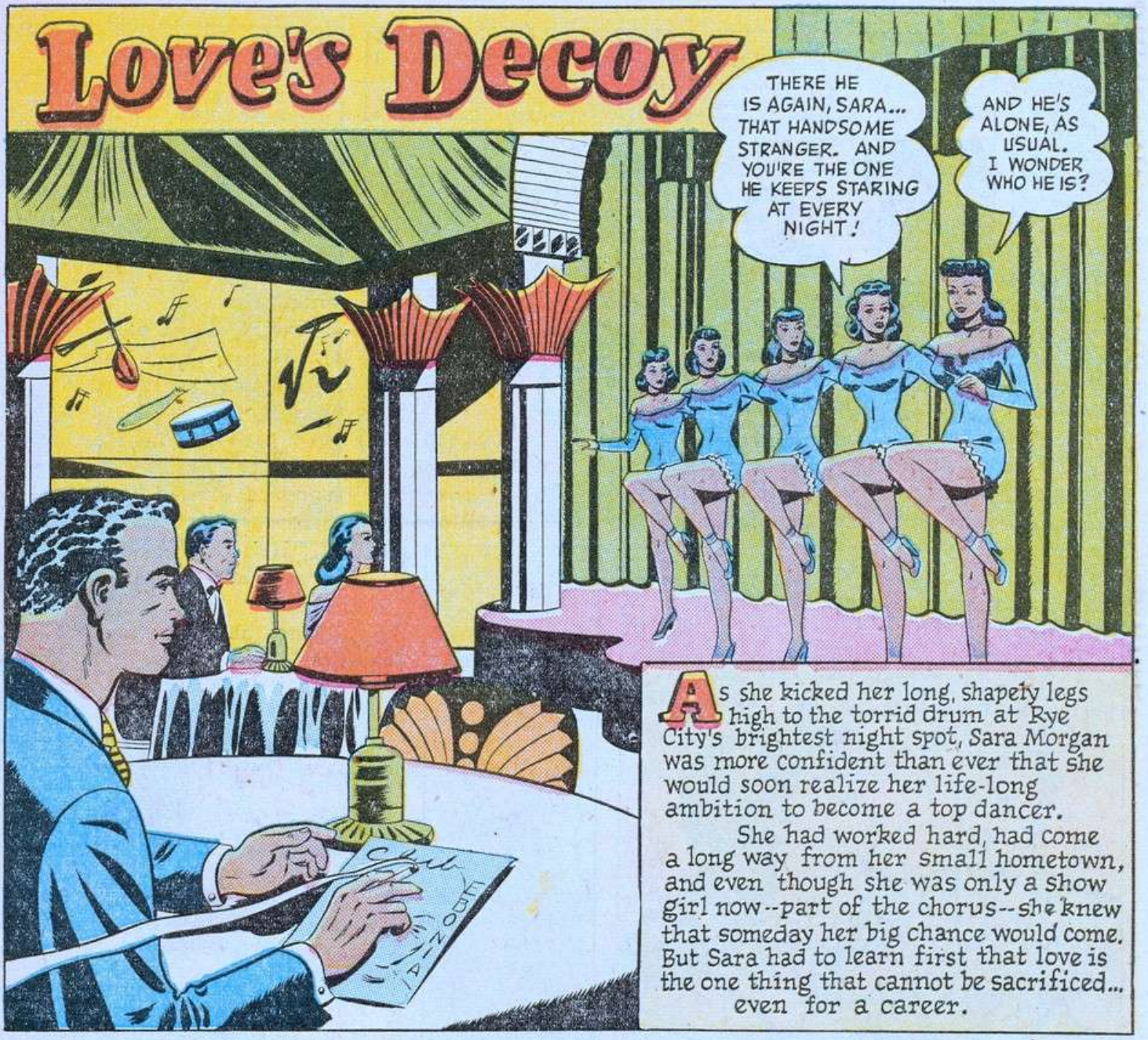
She smothered his words with her lips. "I understand, Jim. You know where it is. And do a good job, darling."

It was the sweetest music she had heard all evening—that splintering sound. And there was a triumphant, almost fierce, look on Jim's face as he smashed the record beneath his heel.

"Come home, my heart," she whispered. "Foolish heart! You are home! You'll always be home—with Jim!"

THE END

Love's Decoy


THERE HE IS AGAIN, SARA... THAT HANDSOME STRANGER. AND YOU'RE THE ONE HE KEEPS STARING AT EVERY NIGHT!
AND HE'S ALONE, AS USUAL. I WONDER WHO HE IS?
CHEZ JAZNOBE

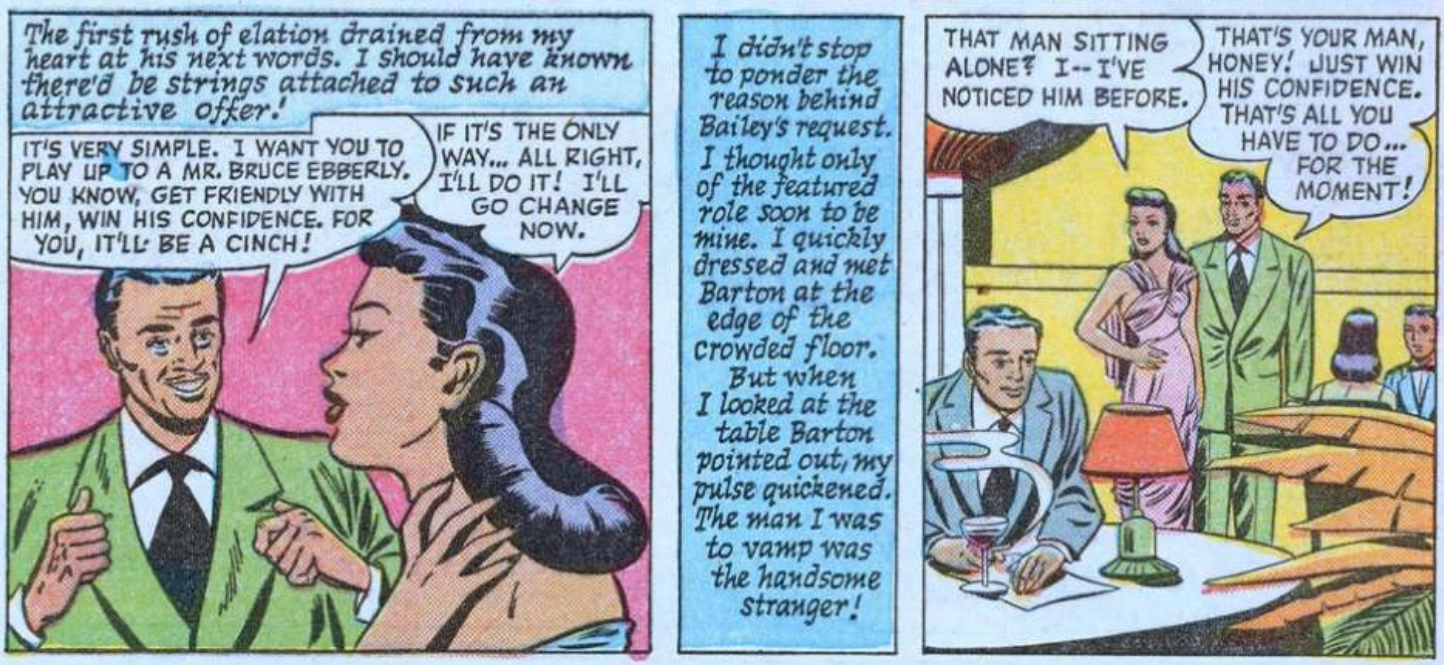
As she kicked her long, shapely legs high to the torrid drum at Rye City's brightest night spot, Sara Morgan was more confident than ever that she would soon realize her life-long ambition to become a top dancer.

She had worked hard, had come a long way from her small hometown, and even though she was only a show girl now--part of the chorus--she knew that someday her big chance would come. But Sara had to learn first that love is the one thing that cannot be sacrificed... even for a career.

My heart skipped a beat as my eyes again were attracted to that handsome face and dazzling smile. But all thought of the intriguing stranger vanished when the matron called me as I walked off the stage...

MR. BAILEY WANTS TO SEE YOU IN HIS OFFICE, SARA. RIGHT AWAY!
THANKS, MRS. BROOKS.
MAYBE HE'S READY TO GIVE ME A FEATURE SPOT IN THE NEW REVUE!

That had been my life-long aim
It would mean that the years of training, the weary jobs in cheap clubs, the dirty rooming houses, had been worth-while. Now, perhaps...
YOU WANTED TO SEE ME, MR. BAILEY?
COME IN, SARA ...AND CLOSE THE DOOR. THIS IS STRICTLY PRIVATE, BETWEEN YOU AND ME!
SARA, I'VE HAD MY EYE ON YOU FOR A LONG TIME. YOU'VE GOT A LOT ON THE BALL, AND I'D LIKE TO GIVE YOU A BREAK. TELL ME, WHAT DO YOU WANT OUT OF LIFE -- FANCY CLOTHES, MINK COATS, DIAMONDS?
THERE'S ONLY ONE THING I REALLY WANT, MR. BAILEY, A SPOT AS A FEATURED DANCER HERE AT THE CLUB.
IT'S YOURS! AND CALL ME BARTON -- IT SOUNDS MORE COSY. OF COURSE, YOU'LL HAVE TO DO ME A LITTLE FAVOR FIRST!
I... WHAT DO YOU WANT ME TO DO?


The first rush of elation drained from my heart at his next words. I should have known there'd be strings attached to such an attractive offer!
IT'S VERY SIMPLE. I WANT YOU TO PLAY UP TO A MR. BRUCE EBBERLY. YOU KNOW, GET FRIENDLY WITH HIM, WIN HIS CONFIDENCE. FOR YOU, IT'LL BE A CINCH!
IF IT'S THE ONLY WAY... ALL RIGHT, I'LL DO IT! I'LL GO CHANGE NOW.
I didn't stop to ponder the reason behind Bailey's request. I thought only of the featured role soon to be mine. I quickly dressed and met Barton at the edge of the crowded floor. But when I looked at the table Barton pointed out, my pulse quickened. The man I was to vamp was the handsome stranger!
THAT MAN SITTING ALONE? I-- I'VE NOTICED HIM BEFORE.
THAT'S YOUR MAN, HONEY! JUST WIN HIS CONFIDENCE. THAT'S ALL YOU HAVE TO DO... FOR THE MOMENT!

It seemed almost as though fate had decreed a way for me to meet my handsome admirer. I started toward him and, as a waiter passed, seemingly stumbled...
LOOK OUT!
I'M SORRY... IT WAS VERY CLUMSY OF ME!
OF COURSE NOT! IT WAS AN ACCIDENT.

PLEASE SIT DOWN. I'VE BEEN JUST WAITING FOR A CHANCE TO MEET YOU. MY NAME'S BRUCE EBBERLY.
AND I'M SARA MORGAN. I'LL ACCEPT YOUR INVITATION ON ONE CONDITION... THAT YOU FORGIVE ME!

At close range, Bruce Ebberly was even more attractive than when I first saw him from the stage. Barton had warned me not to mention his name, but he had nothing to fear... it was no trouble at all concentrating on Bruce, and in no time we were laughing and talking like old friends. Then...
I HOPE I DON'T SEEM TOO BOLD, SARA, BUT MAY I MEET YOU AFTER THE SHOW?
THE LAST SHOW GOES ON PRETTY LATE AND I MUST GO STRAIGHT HOME, BUT—YES, THAT WOULD BE WONDERFUL, BRUCE!

I could hardly wait for the final chords in the last number, and when the curtain closed, I hurriedly dressed and left the club...
SO YOU MANAGED TO SIT THROUGH TWO MORE SHOWS?
IT HASN'T BEEN AN EFFORT. I COULD WATCH YOU DANCE FOREVER, SARA!
CLUB EBONIA

After that first meeting, I saw Bruce at every opportunity. Doing even the simplest things held a measure of excitement I never dreamed of. One afternoon, I packed a lunch and we drove into the country...
SAY, WHERE'D YOU LEARN TO COOK? THAT WAS TERRIFIC!
I'D HAVE YOU KNOW YOU'RE LOOKING AT THE BEST COOK IN MIDDLETON HIGH SCHOOL'S COOKING CLASS!

AND I'M LOOKING AT THE LOVELIEST GIRL IN MIDDLETON OR ANYWHERE ELSE IN THE WORLD! SARA -- DARLING, YOU MUST KNOW HOW I FEEL ABOUT YOU!
YES, BRUCE ... I KNOW.

Life was one gay adventure after another with Bruce from then on. He was everything a girl dreams of, handsome, intelligent and with a charm that set my heart aglow. Then, one evening, I entered the dressing room to find...

HURRY UP AND OPEN IT, SARA. WE'VE BEEN DYING TO KNOW WHAT IT IS!

A FUR SCARF! WHY, IT'S BEAUTIFUL!

LUCKY GIRL!

HERE'S A NOTE THAT CAME WITH IT, SARA.

The note was from Barton Bailey-- "Keep up the good work," it read. Puzzled, I hurried to Bailey's office for an explanation ...

YOU'VE DONE A GOOD JOB OF GETTING TO KNOW BRUCE EBBERLY AND I WANTED YOU TO KNOW THAT KNOW THAT BARTON BAILEY KEEPS HIS WORD! THAT SCARF IS JUST THE BEGINNING!

BRUCE! BUT WHY IS THAT SO IMPORTANT TO YOU?

I HAVE ANOTHER LITTLE JOB FOR YOU! POSING FOR A PICTURE. JUST MAKE SURE OUR FRIEND IS IN IT!

BUT WHY? I DON'T UNDERSTAND!

YOU DON'T HAVE TO UNDERSTAND! HAVE EBBERLY SIGN THE FOLDER THE PHOTOGRAPH COMES IN. TELL HIM YOU WANT HIS AUTOGRAPH... ANYTHING... JUST GET HIS SIGNATURE!

NO! I... I CAN'T DO IT. IT SOUNDS STRANGE!

TOO BAD! JUST WHEN I HAD PLANNED TO GIVE YOU THAT FEATURED SPOT IN THE NEW SHOW!

FEATURED SPOT! ALL... ALL RIGHT, BARTON, I'LL DO IT.

The thrill of attaining my goal drowned out the small voice inside me that cried out a warning. I told myself that Barton probably had a legitimate reason for wanting Bruce's signature. And, blinding my eyes, was the vision of my name in lights! A star! Then, Barton's arms encircled me and...

PLEASE, BARTON! DON'T...

OKAY, SARA. BUT REMEMBER -- I ALWAYS GET WHAT I WANT-EVENTUALLY.

I left his office, my mind torn with conflict. But each time I wavered on the brink of indecision, the bait Barton had held out to me erased all else from my thoughts. The next night, I went dancing with Bruce at a club where I knew there would be a photographer...
LOOK, BRUCE! THERE'S A PHOTOGRAPHER! LET'S HAVE OUR PICTURE TAKEN!
ANYTHING YOU WANT, DARLING! LET'S HOPE I DON'T BREAK THE CAMERA!
Soon...
DO I REALLY LOOK LIKE THAT?
IT'S A VERY GOOD PICTURE OF YOU, BRUCE. WOULD YOU AUTOGRAPH IT FOR ME -- JUST YOUR NAME.
I--I WANT IT FOR MY ALBUM.
Still telling myself that it was all a harmless game, I took the signed photograph to Barton, but my heart sank when, later that same night, Barton handed me a phony letter with Bruce's signature on it!
NEVER MIND WHAT'S IN THE LETTER! ALL YOU HAVE TO DO IS PLANT IT IN EBBERLY'S POCKET TONIGHT. I'LL HANDLE THINGS FROM THAT POINT!
I WON'T DO IT! OH, I KNOW I MADE A BARGAIN WITH YOU, BUT I CAN'T HELP FEELING THERE'S SOMETHING DISHONEST BEHIND IT!
SCENE I
COME ON... I WANT TO SHOW YOU SOMETHING. MAYBE THIS WILL CHANGE YOUR MIND.
I WON'T DO IT, I TELL YOU! MY MIND'S MADE UP!
THIS IS IT, HONEY! EVERYTHING IS SET FOR YOU TO DO A SOLO ACT TONIGHT... IF --!
AT LAST! ALL MY DREAMS COME TRUE! BRUCE WOULD UNDERSTAND. AND BAILEY COULDN'T MEAN TO HARM HIM... HE WOULDN'T!
SARA MORGAN
ALL RIGHT, BARTON -- I'LL TAKE THE LETTER!

Just before the show, I sent Bruce a note to come to my dressing room. My heart cried out to him when I saw his eyes so full of love and trust. He swept me into his arms, and the throbbing of my heart was like the primitive drums of the band outside...

I'M GLAD YOU'VE REACHED YOUR GOAL, DARLING! YOU'RE SO FINE AND GOOD YOU DESERVE ONLY THE BEST! THAT'S WHY I LOVE YOU. I'VE SOMETHING TO ASK YOU... AS SOON AS I TAKE CARE OF AN IMPORTANT MATTER.

AND I LOVE YOU! WHATEVER HAPPENS, DARLING, REMEMBER THAT!

That night I danced with a wild abandon I'd never before experienced. The torrid rhythms of the music enveloped me like a consuming flame. Bruce's passionate yet tender kiss still burned my lips. But when I glanced over at his table a sudden chill gripped me...

THOSE MEN AT BRUCE'S TABLE! THEY LOOK LIKE POLICE!

THE LETTER BARTON GAVE ME! IS THAT WHAT THEY'RE AFTER?

WHAT HAVE I DONE-- WHAT HAVE I DONE?

The moment the music stopped, I rushed into Barton's office, oblivious to the thunderous applause greeting my solo dance. I knew now that I had been deluding myself that Bailey meant no harm. My success had meant more than Bruce's love--and now--!

WHAT'S THIS ALL ABOUT? WHERE HAVE THEY TAKEN BRUCE?

TAKE IT EASY, HONEY! THE COPS DID A GOOD JOB, DIDN'T THEY? SAY, HOW DO YOU LIKE THIS HUNK OF FUR? GENUINE MINK--AND ALL YOURS!

NOW THAT I'M RID OF EBBERLY, THE NOSEY FLATFOOT, WE CAN-- HEY! BE CAREFUL WITH THAT COAT!

I WOULDN'T TOUCH IT WITH A TEN-FOOT POLE! I DEMAND TO KNOW WHAT YOU'VE DONE TO BRUCE!

Only when Barton explained the grimy details of his plot to frame Bruce did I realize I had been used as a decoy to ruin the man I loved. Bruce was a detective, and I was the one who had betrayed him to the unscrupulous Barton!
SURE HE WAS A COP! AND HE WAS TOO NOSEY FOR HIS OWN GOOD ... DUG UP SOME THINGS ABOUT THE WAY I RUN THE CLUB. I HAD TO GET RID OF HIM!
AND THAT LETTER WITH BRUCE'S NAME ON IT... THAT WAS PART OF THE SCHEME, TOO?
THAT LETTER DID THE TRICK! IT MENTIONED A $15,000 BRIBE TO LEAVE ME ALONE. THAT WILL GET HIM KICKED OFF THE FORCE FOR GOOD! AND IF YOU WANT TO KEEP THAT PRETTY FACE OF YOURS, YOU'LL KEEP QUIET!
STOP! YOU'RE HURTING ME! PLEASE, BARTON! ... I WON'T TALK!
I broke away from Barton's grasp and somehow made my way home, knowing that one of Bailey's henchmen followed me. The next morning, the local papers carried stories of Bruce's discharge. My eyes were red with weeping as I sank into a deep pit of loneliness and despair...
I MUST TELL THE TRUTH ... SOB... I CAN'T LET BRUCE SUFFER -- I-I'LL GO TO THE POLICE!
DAILY EXAMINED FRAMED SAYS COP
THE MAN WHO FOLLOWED ME! HE'S STILL THERE! I MUST FIND SOME WAY TO DUCK HIM!
Fully aware that I was taking my life in my hands, I threw on my coat and slipped downstairs. Then, taking a deep breath, I made a dash through the crowded street with Barton's thug hard on my heels...
EXCUSE ME ... PLEASE! LET ME THROUGH!
I'VE GOT TO MAKE IT! I MUST SAVE BRUCE!
TO THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE! A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH!
TAXI
20¢ ¼ MILE

I was sick with fright when I reached the District Attorney's office. There, I poured out the whole story of how Barton had framed Bruce, even the sordid role I had played in betraying the man who meant more to me than my career, more than even life itself...

... AND THAT'S THE WHOLE STORY. EVERYTHING IS TRUE!

THIS BREAKS THE CASE WIDE OPEN! GET EVERY WORD OF WHAT SHE SAYS!

YES, SIR!

ARREST BARTON BAILEY IMMEDIATELY, AND BRING EBBERLY TO MY OFFICE.

I knew I had crucified myself, but the inward peace I felt after speaking the truth in defense of the man I loved made me know that I could stand the years of loneliness that lay ahead for me. Suddenly, in response to an instinctive warning, I looked up...

THAT MAN... **HELP!**

A searing pain flashed through my shoulder. Mercifully, I blacked out. When I fought my way back to consciousness...

HELLO, THERE. YOU'RE A PRETTY LUCKY GIRL! IT'S ONLY A FLESH WOUND!

DID -- DID THEY GET THE MAN -- WHO SHOT ME?

HE'S BEEN CAPTURED, AND THE POLICE ARE ROUNDING UP BAILEY AND HIS GANG!

THEN BRUCE IS CLEARED!

BUT THERE CAN BE NO LIFE FOR ME WITHOUT HIM. IF ONLY...

SARA! W-WHAT HAPPENED? ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?

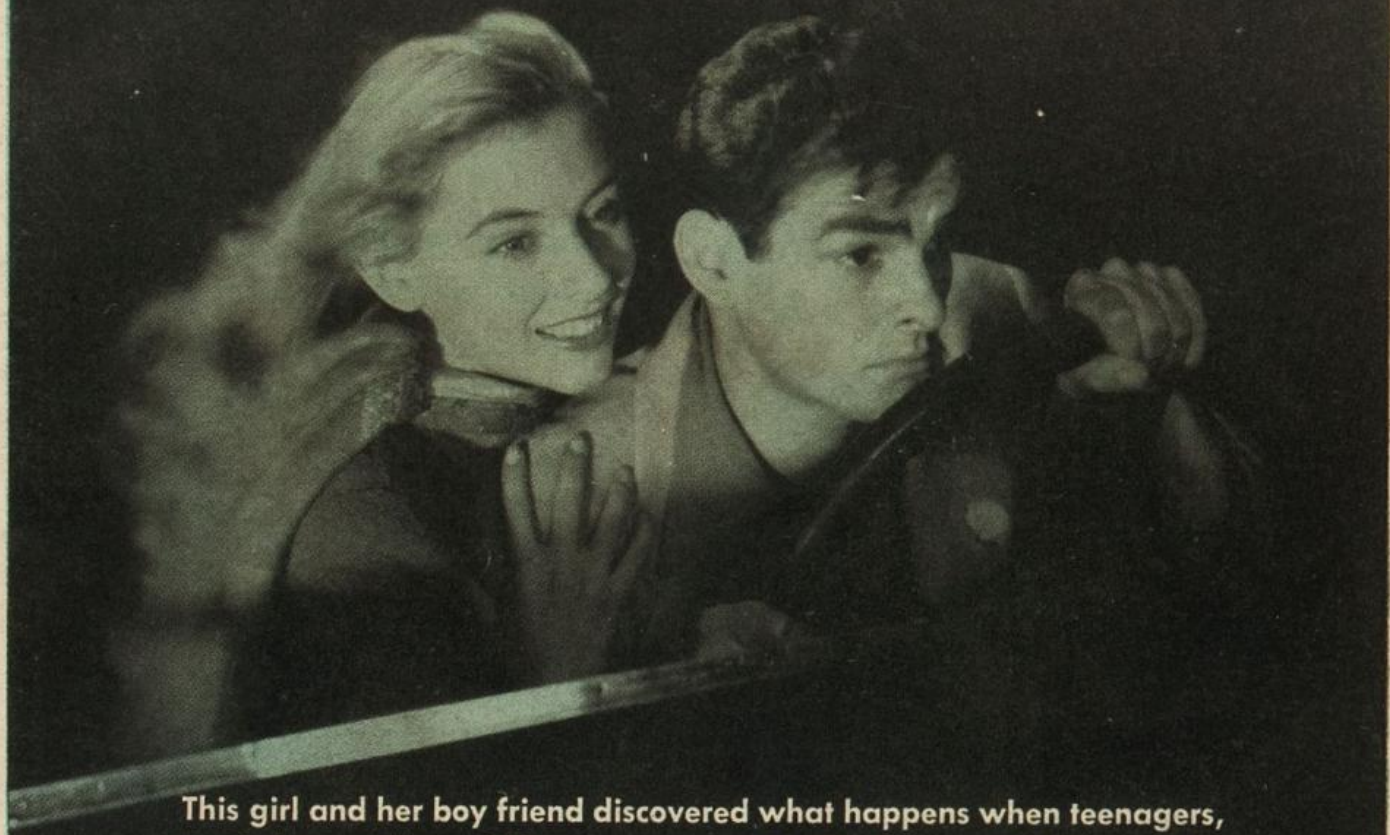
OH, BRUCE! DO I STILL MEAN ANYTHING TO YOU THAT YOU SHOULD SHOW SUCH CONCERN?

CAN YOU EVER FORGIVE ME, DARLING?

I LOVE YOU, SARA -- IT'S NOT HARD TO FORGIVE THE ONE YOU LOVE. I GUESS PART OF THE TEST OF LIVING IS THE WILL TO MAKE UP FOR PAST MISTAKES!

MAY 3 1950

TEENICIDE!



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